The programmes are being constantly reviewed to improve implementation. Attention is also being given to increasing public awareness through information, education and communication activities.

Health Officers at Ports and Airports

4307. SHRI C.M. IBRAHIM : Will the MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state :

(a) whether there is a proposal to post Port Health Officers at airports and ports to check the standard of edible items being imported for human consumption;

(b) if so, the functions of these officers and how they are proposed to be placed vis-a-vis customs officials; and

(c) the factors justifying the need for introduction of a separate cadre of Port Health Officers (PHOs) ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI N.T. SHANMUGAM) : (a) and (b) The Port Health Officers/Airport Health Officers are already posted at Ports/Airports respectively and are required to assist the custom officers as and when required under section 151(b) of the customs Act 1962 for checking the fitness of edible items being imported for human consumption.

(b) There is no separate cadre of Port Health Officers. Doctors of the Central Health Services are posted as Port Health Officers.

Popularity of Herbal Medicines

4308. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY : Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state :

(a) whether his attention has been drawn to the news-item appearing in the Times of India dated 6th April, 2000 under the caption "Indian Medicine Systems gaining ground";

(b) if so, the reaction thereof;

(c) whether any authentic survey has been conducted so far to assess popularity of the Indian herbal medicines in the global market and if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor; and

(d) what steps are proposed to be taken to promote Indian Medicines, in collaboration, if necessary, with Indian industries ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI N.T. SHANMUGAM) : (a) and (b) The Government has seen the news report and are aware of the contents.

(c) Various reports suggest popularity of Indian herbal medicines in global market. No official survey has, however, been done. Efforts are on to sensitise industry to conduct such a survey.

(d) The industry has agreed to have a committee chaired by the President of Confederation of indian Industy and co-haired by Secretary, Indian Systems of Medicine and Homeopathy to address all matters relating to herbal medicines, to advise member units to grow medicinal plants, open ISM and H dispensaries and introduce Yoga in works/offices. The industry is also assisting in developing publicity materials for propagation abroad. More collaboration with the industry would open up after Medicinal Plants Board is set up.

Spread of Hepatitis 'C'

4309. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY : Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item, ''Hepatitis 'C' spreading due to unscreened blood'', appearing in the Times of India dated 7th April, 2000;

(b) if so, the Government reaction thereto; and

(c) the steps proposed to be taken to discontinue the collection of blood from unscreened donor ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI N.T. SHANMUGAM) : (a) Yes Sir.

(b) and (c) The Government is proposing to start madatory testing for Hepatitis 'C' virus in all blood banks at the earliest. In this connection the following steps are being taken to start mandatory testing for Hepatitis 'C' :—

(i) Technical specifications for the proposed HIV/ELISA Kits has been drawn by a Technical Committee.

(ii) The procurement process for Hepatitis 'C'/ELISA Kits has been started.

(iii) Necessary changes to Drugs and Cosmetics Rules is being made so that Hepatitis 'C' testing becomes a Statutory requirement.